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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 002252

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR S. DELISI, M. RAYNOR
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR J. FRAZER, D. TEITELBAUM
LONDON FOR C. GURNEY
PARIS FOR C. NEARY
NAIROBI FOR T. PFLAUMER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/13/2013

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: MUGABE VIGNETTES

Classified By: Political Officer Win Dayton under Section 1.5(b)(d)

¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Embassy offers the following brief collection of personal tidbits on President Mugabe gleaned from the UN Resident Representative here and friends of the Mugabe family. The vignettes depict an ailing, egotistical family man interested in leaving office but give no indication of when he would be prepared to leave. END SUMMARY.

Ailing But In Command

¶12. (C) UN Resident Representative Victor Angelo on November 12 advised Ambassador Sullivan that Mugabe has consulted with a UN medical specialist about some of his medical problems. According to Angelo, Mugabe's ailments include periodic convulsions and stroke-like episodes (perhaps eschemia) brought on by diabetes and a lipid disorder which affects the covering of the brain. He apparently suffered one of these episodes several weeks ago, although he never left the country. Mugabe reportedly can be revived rather quickly on such occasions but does need to be under constant observation since he can fall or suffocate during the episode. (COMMENT: Evidence on the nature of Mugabe's health-related "episode" during the weekend of October 25-26 and whether he left the country for medical treatment remains conflicting and inconclusive. END COMMENT.) The presidential motorcade, witnessed periodically hurtling through city streets at 100 kph, always includes a marked ambulance. In any event, Mugabe's public appearances and reports of his behavior in private suggest that he generally remains lucid and assertive, albeit apparently frail at times, in discharging the duties of his office.

Contractor's Tale Exposes Ego, Insecurity

¶13. (C) According to the principal contractor (an Embassy employee's father-in-law related to the Mugabe family by marriage) in the ongoing construction of Mugabe's suburban "retirement" home, Mugabe takes an active role at the construction site. He noted that Mugabe has placed a high priority on having the house ready to be occupied by the end of the year and makes repeated comments in private underscoring his eagerness to retire. Mugabe generally visits the site at least a couple of times a week and has a formal meeting with construction principals once a week to review progress and to discuss issues. At the most recent weekly meeting, the contractor noted that payment was not being made in timely manner, a problem Mugabe personally promised would be remedied quickly. (COMMENT: Although we are unaware of other Mugabe family financial problems, the ruling party is feeling the crunch of the country's economic collapse. The party recently suffered a default judgment in excess of one billion ZimDollars (USD200,000) over non-payment of a contract for campaign t-shirts; the party is working the judgment out with the ZANU-PF MP who owned a controlling interest in the plaintiff. Still imposing at a distance, the party's 12-storey headquarters' significant deterioration exemplifies financial distress; visitors enter a vacant lobby featuring unrepainted metal detectors and broken windows. END COMMENT.)

¶14. (C) The contractor characterized Mugabe generally as personable and reasonable in personal engagement. The same could not be said for his wife, Grace, to whom the President always deferred on home issues. She constantly changed her mind, requiring major jobs to be redone over trivial changes in personal whim and with no regard to cost. The level of some ceilings had been redone four times, some floors twice. Mugabe on occasion questioned the need for certain measures until the contractor indicated they had been done at Grace's behest, whereupon he always accepted them. The contractor said the couple had serious personality conflicts and were essentially estranged. They each had separate sections of the house and she insisted on having a separately metered

energy source, an indication of paranoia the contractor said surfaced frequently.

15. (C) At a recent semi-social gathering sponsored by Mugabe for the construction workers, an Italian sub-contractor took the occasion to criticize Mugabe for "what he was doing to the country." According to the contractor, Mugabe responded by terminating the contractor's employment on the spot and giving him a couple of weeks to pack his bags and get out of the country. The pack-up period was a courtesy explicitly given ostensibly because the contractor had family here.

Headmaster's Tale Bespeaks Caring Father, Hectored Husband

16. (C) According to the headmaster at St George's School (an Embassy employee's family friend), where Mugabe's son attends, Mugabe takes an active interest in his son's education. Mugabe recently visited the headmaster to express concern about his son's performance. Mugabe told the headmaster that he recognized that his son was not a good student and suggested that he might benefit from repeating his current class in the next academic term. The headmaster agreed but urged that a decision be deferred pending results of final exams yet to come. Mugabe agreed. Days later, Grace stormed into the headmaster's office screaming that she was the only one who could make decisions about her family. She accused the headmaster of thinking her son was thick because he thought she was thick. She insisted that her son's repeating class would not be considered, which the headmaster took as the final word on the matter.

Comment

17. (C) The Italian sub-contractor's dismissal conforms to the pattern of intolerance Mugabe exhibits toward anybody who criticizes him in public or private. Unquestioning loyalty remains more than ever the principal criterion for inclusion in Mugabe's world. The uncritical slavish devotion demanded by his isolated world underlies the ruling party's dysfunctional policy-making and likely assures Zimbabwe's continued political stalemate as long as Mugabe is in charge. Zimbabwe's autocrat may desire to depart office; however, we do not take his interest in changing residence imminently as an indication that the circumstances are right in his mind to justify retirement from office yet.

SULLIVAN